

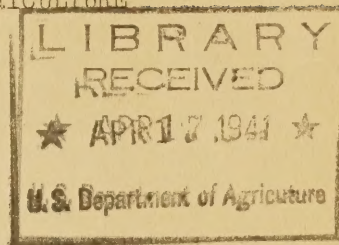
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

SOCIOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN A NATIONAL POLICY FOR AGRICULTURE

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Address, Western Farm Economics Association
Pullman, Washington, July 10-12, 1940



Sociological considerations in American agriculture are likely to be very much like any other objective scientific considerations; sociology can claim no special knowledge denied to other social sciences. Two things, however, it always tries to do: first, to look at every given social fact or phenomenon in its relationship to other elements of which it is a part, and second, to look at every situation as a stage or position between the past and the present and between the present and the future. No social situation is either self-contained or static. American agriculture bears a different relation to other parts of our culture and to our total culture than agriculture does in other cultures. It bears a different relationship now than at any past time in the evolution of our nation and it is to be anticipated that it will bear a still different relationship at some future time.

It is unnecessary here to run the whole gamut of these space and time differences to give orientation to the sociological considerations with which this paper is concerned. It can be secured by placing American agriculture in contrast with agriculture in a predominantly rural or peasant society and in a predominantly industrialized society. For this purpose we have selected Roumania and England.

In Roumania, about 80 percent of the total gainfully occupied are engaged in agriculture. In Great Britain only 6 percent.

In Roumania, out of a total population of 19,000,000, there are only about 215,000 engaged in manufacturing industries. Only 10 percent of all of Roumania's imports are foodstuffs and unmanufactured products, but approximately 49 percent of all of her exports are agricultural products.

Approximately 65 percent of Great Britain's imports are of foodstuffs and unmanufactured products and only 29 percent is of manufactured materials. Less than 20 percent of her exports are food and raw products, and approximately 75 percent are manufactured products.

1/ Read by Mr. Provinse.

In the United States only 25 percent of the people are employed in agriculture, 25 percent of the total exports are agricultural products, and 25 percent of the total imports are agricultural products. We, however, export only a little more than 10 percent of our agricultural products, another way of saying that in the United States our agriculture is operated largely for the maintenance of our own society. Unlike Roumania, we are not predominantly an agricultural exporting nation, and unlike England, we are not predominantly an agricultural importing nation.

Even were the world a single economic unit, with no national trade or other barriers, the meaning and significance of agriculture would be different to those who farm in England, in Roumania, and in the United States. A nation of farmers, whether completely self-sufficient or whether tied to a money and market economy, is different from a nation of industrialists. A nation half agricultural and half industrial is different from either. These differential considerations on an international basis have a parallel in the regional diversity of American rural life and they become basic sociological considerations in any national programs for agriculture.

The direction and nature of development is another basic consideration. American agriculture and American rural life today are greatly conditioned by a century and a half of rapid movement and expansion, by a concurrently accelerating national industrial development and by a changing world situation of almost incredible speed and scope.

These considerations forbid, therefore, the acceptance either of a completely rationalized or a completely agrarian approach to understanding or planning for American agriculture. Such approaches and plans disregard the laws of cultural evolution and adjustment, which have in the world at large, and in the United States in particular, allowed for the development of different types of rural economy, with different practices, values and institutions, due to different cultural backgrounds, local physical conditions, and stimulations from outside.

On the whole the English industrial market economy from which the bulk of American farmers came and from which our highly commercialized agriculture developed has tended in this country to strengthen and perpetuate its traditional commercial values and to regard land and its products only as resources to be used up, processed as it were, into profits. The results of such an exploitative process, despite its amazing development of individual initiative and wealth, have, as we all know, frequently been disruptive of stable human adjustments to land and more frequently highly detrimental to proper land use or conservation.

On the other hand, the more characteristically peasant types of agricultural adjustment in America, and there are many of these, have in general approached and used the land with somewhat more sacred regard, some deeper appreciation of the intrinsic worth of land for its own sake.

Most commonly, whenever forces outside their control did not prevent it, these farming folk have husbanded their land from depletion and undue exhaustion, and for their efforts have been repaid by their ability to retain their holdings in the face of natural and economic crises which frequently dispossessed or demoralized their neighbors.

In peasant civilizations the fertility of the soil is as carefully safeguarded as life itself, for indeed it is life in terms of guaranteeing life-giving food and fiber for the farm family. In England, under a tenant system of agriculture, the maintenance of soil fertility must be guaranteed by contract. While soil fertility can be, and apparently is, fairly well maintained by contract in England, there can be little doubt that its conservation is more surely guaranteed when the stimulus for its conservation is in the value system of husbandmen rather than in legally enforceable contractual arrangements. In one case the land has intrinsic worth, in the other it tends to have only economic worth.

Were the problem of American agriculture simply one of choice between these two ways of rural life, agriculture as a peasant adjustment with its close primary group participation, self-sufficiency, careful husbandry and often self-denial, or agriculture as a business run for profit, in which the soil is but the crucible out of which gold will be reduced, our sociological task would be fairly simple. It would be no task at all, in fact, since most of the values and the sociological characteristics of the two extreme adjustments are already known and proponents of both ways of life are many, exceedingly vocal, and frequently convincing.

It is, however, not so simple as this. The problem of American agriculture, realistically faced, is not an "either-or" question. It is a question of variety, of process, of change, of adjustment and readjustment. There is probably no doubt as to the virtues fostered by the agrarian way of life and the basic human values to which they are tied. But it must be remembered that these virtues and values are relative to the particular cultural situations in which they are found, and that they cannot be detached from the total setting of which they are a part and transplanted at will into a new environment.

We have a lesson to learn on our own continent from what has happened to most of our American Indian groups. Within the particular pattern or context of their varied cultural adjustments, some as hunters, some as agriculturists, some sedentary, some nomadic, each tribe developed many virtues of endurance, courage, independence, and self-sufficiency. Some few far-sighted administrators of Indian affairs -- all too few in fact -- have appreciated the strength, the character, and integrity of these early Americans and have striven desperately to preserve these basic fundamental values. Such attempts on the whole are successful insofar as they are able to preserve the cultural setting out of which these virtues arose and of which they are a part; they are on the whole unsuccessful insofar as powerful outside forces and values enter in and

break down the functional setting in which these virtues operate. It is not, as many are prone to say, that these notably worthy traits of character, of leadership, integrity, honesty and endurance are lacking in these tribal cultures or that they are essentially different from our own in absolute value; it is simply that virtues and values live and grow and justify themselves in the particular cultural setting which gives them life and if that cultural setting is changed, a new orientation must be given these values or they, along with the cultural practices and institutions of which they are a functional part, will lose their validity and their effectiveness.

Disintegration and demoralization have been the fate of innumerable culture groups, not only in native America but in all of those parts of the world that have come into contact with the industrial forces of the Western world. Some have held out longer than others, some have adjusted more rapidly than others, some have succumbed completely. In no case of record have naked and absolute values been transferred outright from one cultural setting to another. The preservation of basically sound elements of family, tribal, and national integrity and integration is a fundamental problem of social process.

Does this have meaning for sociological considerations in American agriculture, and if so, where? As indicated earlier, American agriculture is not a simple or a single problem. In varying proportions and degrees, it embraces all types of agricultural ways of life, from the extremely self-sufficient Hopi Indians of northern Arizona, the closely-knit Spanish-American farming communities of the Southwest, the agricultural village life of the Mormons, to the highly commercialized truck and dairy farmers and adventurous wheat farmers of the Western plains, whose agricultural practices, values, institutions, and hopes lie almost wholly within the orbit and influence of the money and market economy of urban life. Any real understanding of the problems of American agriculture is to be had along this gamut of adjustment, in its regional setting. The analysis of the variant rural institutions, practices, standards and values, as they exist in space and as they change in time and in conflict, is probably the greatest contribution that sociology and kindred social sciences has to make to problems of American agriculture.

Between the two extremes in America -- of farming, as a processing business as truly as furniture making is a business, to an agrarian self-sufficiency that is almost completely detached from urban values, -- stand a great variety of cultural adjustments, made and in the making; adjustments that represent valiant efforts to harmonize or perpetuate locally significant virtues against the tugs and pulls, this way and that, from the outside world. If it is to be the function of government to assist in achieving stability and security for American farmers, in achieving a balance between agriculture and industry, and in preserving and advancing the democratic way of life, it is the responsibility of government to know its farm people, their social organization and institutions, their system of moral and economic values, their hopes and perplexities in a rapidly changing world. It is not sufficient to know these on some average national basis; it is essential to know them in their local or regional

setting. It is not sufficient to know them as detached bits of unrelated knowledge; it is essential to know them in their functional relationship to each other. It is not sufficient even to know the total cultural situation in one local setting; it is essential to know and see each cultural adjustment in relationship to the outside forces, national and international, that play upon it.

This is a large order, and a difficult one. But neither the size of the problem nor its difficulty can excuse sociology for not facing it. Woefully lacking at present in our knowledge of American agriculture is any regional description of the human cultural characteristics of farm life. Despite countless descriptions of soils and climate, vegetation and crops, all regionally plotted, cultural delineations and descriptions have lagged far behind. Only when these human, cultural characteristics can be portrayed in their relationship to the economic and physical factors will we begin to furnish governmental bodies with the kind of knowledge they must have for intelligent planning and administration.

During the last 150 years American agriculture has traveled steadily from the ox-cart and ox-team to the automobile and tractor; from the cradle and flail to the combine; from the tallow candle to the electric light; from self-sufficient, highly integrated family and local neighborhood life to commercialized farming and a high degree of socialization from without; from a relatively low but self-controlled material standard of living to a standard much more measured by urban values and items purchased in the market. In terms of historic epochs these transitions have taken place quite rapidly. They were accelerated by the availability of vast potential agricultural natural resources, expanding markets and by consequent rapid exploitation. Though old traits gave way quickly in many places and new ones were just as quickly adopted, we have a past in American agriculture and its echoes, undertones, resistances and values are still with us.

We are today suffering in American agriculture from imbalance -- imbalance not only in production and prices, but imbalance between levels of living and standards of living and between the material and non-material elements in our total culture. It is not a misstatement to say that the basic problem of American agriculture is economic, but it is fallacious to assume that its only satisfactory solution is to be found solely in economic considerations. We cannot expect to develop any stable rural life without an adequate economic base but it is equally important to an adequate and satisfying way of life, that people shall be given things to live for as well as to live with. The destruction or neglect of these cultural values of a group may constitute a far greater spiritual loss than can be compensated for by physical or economic gain.

Sociology and its related social science disciplines must therefore assume responsibility for observing and describing these traditional values and practices of American agriculture, bring them to the understanding of

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planners and administrators, and emphasize that efforts to readjust land use or land-use practices require varying degrees of readjustment in human ideals, human values, and human forms of social organization. The relativity of these cultural forms and values, varying as they do from one part of the country to another, due to ethnic, traditional, religious, geographic and other factors is as important, probably, as any other contribution to our understanding of the human problems of rural adjustment.

If democracy has any meaning at all it must mean that people shall have freedom to work out their salvation through devices of their own making and against the traditional values of their own background. It is the essence of democracy that the people themselves shall have a voice, shall have the voice, in fact, in policy-making and in planning. The nature of this voice must be known. Regimented societies need to know the local differences in values and institutions the better to break them down or to manipulate them to the will of the State; democratic societies need to know these same differences in order to assist and protect the people in their preservation and improvement.

Our main concern up to this time has been with the regional and areal nature of sociological considerations, a concern dictated by the need for more specific sociological information and by the fact that only by dealing in areas are we able to get the whole picture which is necessary for successful planning and administration. This does not mean, of course, that the conventional type of sociological work dealing with social organization and social processes can or should be neglected. We are simply urging a more practical orientation of social information so that our knowledge can be more readily organized for action. Sociological investigations dealing with social stratification, the family, competition and conflict, cooperation, mobility, etc., are as urgent as ever, but these will have to be carried on with due regard to their regional and local peculiarities so that when results are obtained they will have applicability to a particular local situation. Too long have we dealt in average, or least-common-denominator types of generalizations having universal validity, perhaps, but having very little applicability to specific problems or people. Planning cannot proceed without the latter type of orientation of our findings.

It is not enough to know, for instance, the characteristics of cooperation or level of living as a mere concept in some large theoretical organization of knowledge. It is necessary to know about these things with regard to particular people living together in particular areas dealing with and facing particular problems. Only when we bring our sociological analysis down onto the ground will we be able to provide adequate knowledge for action.

Practically every agricultural adjustment program states, and every one accepts, the prime objective of agricultural policy as the attainment of an adequate and satisfactory standard of living for those who farm, with

agriculture, of course, recognizing its responsibility in helping the whole nation to attain such a standard. The standard of living is a sociological concept and a social standard. It should be one of the prime considerations in a national policy for agriculture. What has the sociologist to contribute to this consideration?

He starts by making clear the difference between a level of living and a standard of living, and this distinction is of importance in policy-making and program planning. The level of living consists of the habits of consumption -- of goods and services -- of an individual, family or other group measured on a scale of adequacies, the amount and adequacy of foods, the adequacy of shelter, of fresh air, etc. The standard of living on the other hand is a cultural, a psychological fact. It is that standard of consumption of goods and services which the individual family or other group wants, would be happy with and is unhappy without. It is the culturally determined, as well as the physically determined, measure of life. It is a very real sociological or psychological phenomenon. It constitutes the objectives for which persons and groups live. It can't be rigidly prescribed by others or by a policy. A national agricultural policy can prescribe a level of living of minimum health, housing and decency, but it cannot prescribe a standard of living. It can assist in furnishing or keeping open opportunities for individuals, families and other groups to attain health, education, and even recreation. It can and should go further and deny any individual, family, or other segment of the population the right to jeopardize the health or welfare of its neighbors or future generations. But no agency can, except by educational methods, make persons want these things. Furthermore, to attempt to do so develops confusion and even frustration in individuals and families. If, therefore, the standard of living is a prime consideration in the development of an agricultural policy, the sociological part of that consideration is seeing that those whose levels of living fall below levels of good health and decency shall have opportunities to make progress toward the attainment of their own measure of cultural adequacy and satisfaction.

Let us make the consideration clearer and more pointed. If on the large body of land that is to be irrigated from the Grand Coulee Dam and made available for occupancy by farmers, it is desirable to use an adequate and satisfactory standard of living as a measure of policy and planning, then the levels of living planned for should be definitely conditioned, if not gauged, by the standards of living of prospective settlers. These investigations are not proposed for the purpose of attempting to crystallize standards of living as they now exist, but to enable us better to understand what are the real facts about levels and standards of living in various areas in order to improve these in a way most compatible with the local cultural values and aspirations.

It has recently been shown, for instance, in the Southwest, that \$400 per year for a Spanish-American family in one area probably furnishes a more satisfactory standard of living for those resident there than does \$1,000 a year obtained by certain Texas-Oklahoma settlers in the same region. These differences are less understood in terms of dietary requirements than they are in terms of cultural and traditional factors.

If the first sociological consideration in policy-making is that of guaranteeing decent levels of living for those who farm, a second consideration is that social health and stability are best conserved and promoted by the smoothest possible functioning of all components of a culture. If the standard of living so far exceeds the level of living, or the level of living so far exceeds the purchasing power of the individual or family as to breed frustration and discouragement, social and psychological maladjustments result. If material progress far outruns the opportunities for non-material, social, or cultural progress, the same thing happens. This is true because cultural evolution -- social change -- while it may seem at times to take place by the rapid thrust forward of some single-line development such as money making, mechanization, housing, or some leisure time activity, never really consolidates its advance and guarantees its permanence until and unless the other normal and necessary components of culture have been brought into line.

A third sociological consideration for agricultural planning in America is a more thorough knowledge of cooperation. Cooperative effort is a logical extension of the democratic process, but we need to describe and present for planning those cultural and psychological factors that deter or foster such cooperation. Cooperative activity, it is now realized, is much more than a mere contribution of money or labor to some common venture rationally conceived. It involves utilization of the social machinery existing in any particular area that is most adaptable to the purpose at hand and most likely to advance effective participation. It involves the faith, sacrifice, and integrity that are not a part of the economic process narrowly defined. It is essential to know the fundamental cultural bases of cooperative activity in American rural life if real cooperation is to be achieved.

Closely related to the matter of cooperation is the question of presenting for agricultural programs generally the principal features of social organization. There exist in rural life many social groupings of both formal and informal nature that can readily be adapted to handling governmental programs both in planning and in action. It is the duty of the sociologists, social psychologists, and anthropologists to delineate and describe, in relation to land problems, the function of these various pieces of social machinery. Only by adequate description and graphic portrayal of social organization in this way can we hope to curb the tendency of administrators to deal directly with individuals, thus cutting across and breaking down existing local mechanisms for effective group cooperation and participation.

A fourth important sociological consideration is the whole cluster of sociological problems involved in resettlement and rehabilitation, including relief. Population pressures, depleted or exhausted resources, have in many places in the country brought about critical conditions in the adjustment between the land and the people. To remedy these critical situations, many resettlement and rehabilitation projects have been started and additional ones are contemplated. Though the population and economic factors are strongly determining in most of these resettlement areas, the Government needs to know many things about social participation, cooperation, institutions, and class structure that can be related definitely to the

problem of achieving stable resettlement conditions. It needs to know what types of settlement under certain conditions have the greatest chance for success. It should know this not alone on some rational scheme of dividing the number of acres by the number of people, but against a background of the various settlement patterns in the parts of the country from which the resettled people are migrating. It needs to be able to weigh any proposed resettlement scheme, to show the advantages and disadvantages of the village, line, or dispersed farmstead types, against the background of the people and the fitness of the new environment and type of economy for such settlement.

As we have woven the fabric of our national culture through normal evolution from, and adaptation to, the trends and forces existent in America, and as we look to a future development which will apparently not be greatly different, we can probably assume that our agricultural policy must consider the necessity of our agriculture being pretty highly commercialized, but at the same time of great enough magnitude, in terms of the people who live on the land, to make it desirable that we guarantee to those people as many as possible of the cultural values which peasant agricultures have developed.

The sociological considerations and the treatment of them in American agricultural programs will be most effective for planning if they are investigated and presented in their regional relationships with other factors, against the cultural background of their development, and so specifically that they can be organized not for a theoretical system of knowledge, but for practical application to action.

